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Thomas Lincoln, father
of Abraham Lincoln

LINCOLN ROOM
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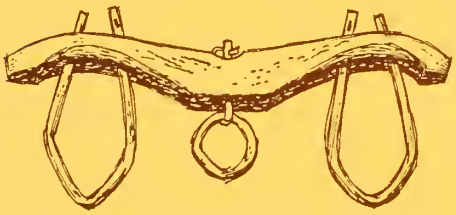

MEMORIAL
the Class of 1901

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HARLAN HOYT HORNER
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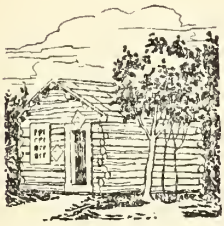
Thomas Lincoln

Father of Abraham Lincoln



John T. Thomas

At the dedication of an ornamental fence erected by the Kiwanis Clubs of Illinois and Iowa, and dedicated at a service held at the grave of Thomas Lincoln and his wife, near Mattoon, Illinois, Sunday afternoon, Dec. 2, 1934, Dr. John T. Thomas, minister of the First Presbyterian church, Springfield, Illinois, officially representing Governor Henry Horner, delivered the following address. The First Presbyterian church of Springfield, Illinois, is the church attended by Abraham Lincoln during his residence in that city and the "Lincoln Pew" in it is sacredly kept and treasured.

THOMAS LINCOLN, we are gathered today to honor your memory as a worthy sire of a noble son. But it is not ours to consecrate this bit of Illinois soil. Your son, Abraham, long ago spoke true and noble words when he said, in effect, on a famous battle field, "We cannot hallow this ground." One cannot lay an unholy soul in sacred soil. This plot is long since hallowed as the final resting place of you who were privileged to become the father of a great man and good. And who would ask a nobler heritage?

Pioneer and Early Settler

We are not forgetting that you were a pioneer, and early settler. That you left a cabin home in a neighbor state and launched forth into a roadless wilderness, in a covered wagon. Kentucky little noted, nor long remembered, your departure. Indiana and Illinois did not come as we, a vast throng, have come today, to welcome you. Only the trees and the tangled grass of a virgin prairie saw you and your quiet family pass by.

Your first house among us, like the one you left, was carved from our forests by your own honest hands. But your first roof made from shingles you yourself rived, sheltered and nurtured more than you knew.

We Have Builded On Your Foundations

Humanity has had many favored sons, privileged to render lofty service in various fields. Since first you came, surveyors have plotted our vast and rolling land, and laid it out into counties, townships, cities, farms and homes. We have builded many miles of ribbon roads where you plod through mud and mire. We have erected schools illuminated with electricity where Abraham learned to read by his log fire or flickering candle. We have adopted constitutions and enacted laws with the assistance of your son. Our scientists have counted the stars, read the rocks and mapped the rivers. Recently, Mr. Lincoln, we

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have had here in Illinois, a marvelous pageant in one of the great cities of the world, commemorating a "Century of Progress." There we displayed and looked upon the things we have conceived with our minds and made with our hands. They were different, vastly so, from the things you envisioned and made. I shall not disturb your rest by recounting all that was there, the startling changes, and what we call "progress." The architecture, the illumination, the machinery, the inventions, the lightning-like means of transportation and communication, the discovery of nature's laws and the harnessing of her forces.

But I do want to tell you that your son was there. We erected a replica of his cabin-home which you built. We reconstructed the scenes of his early life and yours. We reconsidered the contributions he made to our state and nation. We did not smile and think of him or you as out of date. You would not have been hurt had you been there. We did think your wagon queer, but we sadly thought we had scarcely attained the mental and spiritual stature of your tall son.

No, Mr. Lincoln, we are not extravagant in either our appreciation or our praise, here in Illinois. We have few heroes and fewer idols. You might even think us mercenary and terribly busy about a multitude of unnecessary things. But we are not entirely insensible to higher values. We do not altogether forget that it is in the realms of ideals and idealism that we finally live. Many of us are ready all over this vast land of ours, to say that you gave us our greatest gift, a noble son.

The Son Who Freed the Slaveholders And the Slaves

And may I ask you to hear this one word more? I shall not follow your son to Washington, to the Presidency; nor remind you that he was a seer who saw farther than the prophets of God in his own day; nor tell you the fireside commonplace that he freed two races, the slaveholders and the slaves, that he stood adamant, and yet was as

tender as his own mother, sleeping yonder in that other grave, must have been. I shall not tell you of his return in his casket, nor of the simple shaft we have erected in his home town. I have just come from that grave. Tens of thousands come each year and quietly look at his simple tomb, and go away better men and Americans. You would be grateful for that. The great men of the world lay wreaths on his sarcophagus, but we common people love and honor him, too.

We have marked his dwelling place, carved his figure and sayings in bronze and stone. We have scanned his every day, and re-read his every word. As said before, we are not making a god of one who was so reverent in the presence of Diety. But we have found no evidence of dishonor, or no trace of that which might cause your sleep to be less restful.

The Greatest Gift to the State Was Your Son

But the greatest gift, we think, made to our state and nation was your son. Rest on, then, in this quiet grave. We would give you a larger part of the soil and state, to which you gave so much, did you require it.

An organization of grateful citizens has met here to dedicate an ornamental fence, not that you may always be remembered, but "lest we forget." This fence is intended to keep no man or child out; nor to erect a barrier between you and these common folks who rest near you, or who may come to see your grave. Much less is the fence to keep you in. The tall mountains cannot do that, the prairies and the rivers are helpless. Your free spirit has gone forth to a fairer land and a fuller life. But you will ever walk among us and be an inspiration to us. Therefore, on behalf of the Governor of Illinois, and in grateful appreciation, I accept this act and gift as a worthy tribute and beautiful deed. May our descendants come here, and go, as we have come and shall go, sure that they and we have trod on holy ground

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